

# TEN YEARS' OBLIVION

L.T. Meade (1854–1914) and Clifford Halifax (1860–1921)

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In the spring of 1890 I was asked to see a patient at Croydon with another doctor in consultation. In this stage of the illness it was only an ordinary case of somewhat severe typhoid fever, but the interest lies in the succeeding stages, when complete recovery seems to have taken place. I have noticed this remarkable illness in my case-book as an instance of perhaps the most extraordinary psychological condition which has occurred in my practice, or I might say in that of any other man.

The patient was a young barrister; he had a wife and three children. The wife was a pretty, rather nervous-looking woman. On the day when I went to see her husband in consultation with the family doctor, I could not help noticing the intensely anxious expression of her face and how her lips moved silently as she followed my words. The illness was severe, but I did not consider it as specially dangerous and had, therefore only encouraging opinions to give her.

I saw Mainwaring again at the end of the week. He was then much better, and I was able to communicate the cheerful tidings to his wife that he was practically out of danger. He was a man of about three-and-thirty years of age, tall, and rather gaunt in appearance, with deep-set grey eyes and a big, massive brow. I have often noticed his peculiar style of face and head as belonging to the legal profession. I could quite believe that he was an astute and clever special pleader. Abbott, the family doctor, told me that he was a common-law barrister, and I could well understand his using eloquent words when he pleaded the case of an unfortunate client.

I did not visit him again, but Abbott wrote to tell me that he had made an excellent recovery without hitch or relapse. Under these circumstances his case had almost passed from my memory when the following startling incident occurred.

I came home one evening prepared to hurry out again to see a sick patient when my servant informed me that a lady was waiting in the consulting-room to see me.

“Did not you tell her that I am not in the habit of seeing patients at this hour?” I asked.

“I did, sir,” replied the man, “but she would not leave. She says she will wait your convenience. But, whatever happens, she must have an interview with you tonight.”

“I had better go and see her, and find out what she wants,” I murmured to myself.

I crossed the hall with some impatience, for I had several most anxious cases on hand, and entered my consulting-room. A slight, girlish figure was seated partly with her back to me. She sprang up when the door opened, and I was confronted by the anxious and pleading face of Mrs. Mainwaring.

“You have come at last,” she said, with a deep sigh. “That is a blessed relief. I have waited for you here because I want to ask your advice. I am in terrible anxiety about my husband.”

“Your husband?” I replied. “But I understood Dr. Abbott to say that he had recovered perfectly. He said he had ordered him for a month to the sea-side, and then hoped that he might resume his professional work.”

“It was so,” she replied. “My husband had a quick recovery. I am told that most typhoid fever patients take a long time to regain their strength, but in his case this was not so. After the worst was over, he seemed to get better by strides and bounds. A fortnight ago Dr. Abbott ordered him to the seaside. I had a fancy for Dover, and thought of going there. I had even written about lodgings when my husband suddenly told me that he did not wish to go to the seaside, and would prefer spending a fortnight amongst his old haunts at Cambridge. We went there. We—we were very happy. I left the children at home. It seemed something like our honeymoon

over again. Yesterday morning I received a letter telling me that my eldest child was not well. I hurried back to Croydon to see her, telling my husband that I would re-join him today. My child's illness turned out to be a trivial one, and I went back to Cambridge by an early train this morning."

Here Mrs. Mainwaring paused and pressed her hand to her heart. Her face, excessively pale before, now turned almost ghastly. She had seated herself; she now stood up, the further to emphasize her words.

"When I reached our lodgings," she said, "my land-lady met me with the astounding intelligence that Mr. Mainwaring had packed up all his belongings and had left Cambridge for London by the express train that morning.

"This news surprised me, but at first I heard it calmly enough. I believed that Edward had grown weary of his own society, was anxious about our little Nancy, and had hurried home. My land-lady, however, looked so mysterious that I felt certain she had something further to say.

"Come in, madam, do come in," she said. "Perhaps you think your good gentleman has gone home."

"I am sure he has," I said. "Can you get me a messenger? I will send a telegram at once and find out. If Mr. Mainwaring has gone home, he ought to have arrived by now."

"My land-lady was quite silent for a minute, then she said, gravely, 'Perhaps I ought to tell you that Mr. Mainwaring behaved in a very singular way before he left my house.'"

"There was something in the woman's manner which impressed me even more than her words. I felt my heart beginning to sink. I followed her into the little sitting-room where my husband and I had spent some happy hours, and begged of her to explain herself. She did so without a moment's hesitation."

"It all happened early this morning," she said. "I brought up breakfast as usual. Mr. Mainwaring was standing by one of the open windows."

"I am going to town," he said, "by the express. I shall pack my things immediately. Bring me my bill."

"I was leaving the room to prepare it when he shouted to me. 'How is it those things have got into the room?' he said. 'Take them away.'"

"What things do you mean, sir?"

"Those woman's things," he said, very crossly. "That work-basket, and that white shawl."

"Why, sir," I said, staring at him, "those things belong to your good lady."

"He looked me full in the face and then burst out laughing. 'You must be mad,' he said. 'I dislike un-seasonable jokes.'"

"He then went into his bedroom and slammed the door noisily behind him. Half-an-hour later he had paid the bill, ordered a cab, and gone off with his luggage. He left all your things behind him, madam. Mr. Mainwaring was collected and quiet enough, and seemed quite the gentleman, except when he spoke of you. Still I don't like the look of affairs at all."

"I listened to my landlady," continued poor Mrs. Mainwaring, "while she told me this strange and most perplexing story. Then I glanced round the room for confirmation of her words. Yes, my husband and all his belongings had vanished, but my work-basket, my new hat, my mantle, my writing-case, and one or two little garments which I was making for the children were still scattered about the drawing-room."

"I went into the bedroom and saw the clothes I had left behind me flung into a heap in a corner of the room. While I was looking at them in a state of mind almost impossible to describe, my land-lady tapped at the door and brought me a note."

“Under the circumstances, madam,’ she said, ‘you may like to see this letter. I have just found it, stamped and directed as you see, on the davenport in the drawing-room. I think it is in Mr. Mainwaring’s writing.”

“I took it from her and looked at it eagerly. It was addressed in my husband’s writing to a Don of the College (Trinity) where he had taken his degree. I did not hesitate to open it. Here it is, Dr. Halifax; you may like to read it. It may possibly help you to throw some light on this awful mystery.”

Mrs. Mainwaring gave me the note as she spoke. It contained the following words:

My Dear Sir, I much regret having missed you when I called yesterday afternoon to say good-bye. I must take the present opportunity of thanking you for your kindness to me during the whole of my University career. I leave Cambridge by an early train this morning, or would call again to say farewell in person. I hope to call to see you on the first occasion when I re-visit Cambridge. Yours sincerely,

Edward Mainwaring

I read the letter twice, and then returned it without comment to the wife.

“Will you re-direct it and post it?” I said, after a pause.

She answered me almost in a whisper.

“The strange thing about that letter is this,” she said. “It is addressed to a dead person. Mr. Grainger, Edward’s old tutor, has been dead for many years. My husband felt his death keenly when it occurred. He has many times told me the personal interest Mr. Grainger took in him. Have you no comment to make with regard to this letter, Dr. Halifax?”

“I shall have plenty to say in a moment,” I answered. “That letter will give us a very important clue to our future actions, but now to proceed; have you nothing further to tell me?”

“Yes; after reading the letter, I rushed to the nearest telegraph office and sent a telegram with a pre-paid reply to my home. I waited with what patience I could for the answer, which came within an hour-and-a-half. My husband had not returned to Stanley Villa. I then took the next train to town and went back to Croydon on the chance of his having arrived there during the day. He had not done so. Dr. Abbott happens to be away, so I have come to you. Can you give me advice? Will you help me in any way?”

“Yes, of course, I will help you,” I said. “Pray sit down.” She had been standing with her hands clasped tightly together during the greater part of our interview. “Your story is a very strange one,” I continued, “and I will give it and you my best attention in a moment. I must run away first, however, to give some instructions with regard to one of my patients, then I shall be at your service.”

She sank into a chair when I told her to sit down. She was trembling all over. Her nerves were strung to a high pitch. I went into the hall, thought for a moment, then, putting on my hat, went out. As I was leaving the house, I told my servant to take a tray with wine and other refreshments into the consulting-room. Then I went a few doors off to see a brother physician. I told him I had a peculiar case to attend to, and asked him to see after my patients until the following day. I then went back to Mrs. Mainwaring; she had not touched the wine nor the biscuits which the servant had brought her.

“Come,” I said, “this will never do. You must have this glass of wine immediately and one or two of these biscuits. You will be able to think much better and, consequently, to find your husband sooner if you take some necessary nourishment. Come, that is better.”

I poured out a glass of port wine and gave it to her. She took it in her small, trembling hand and raised it to her lips, spilling the wine terribly as she did so.

“You will do better now,” I said.

"Oh, it doesn't matter about me," she exclaimed, with impatience; "you have not told me what you think of my story. What possible reason can there be to account for my husband's most strange conduct?"

"I cannot give you a reason yet," I said. "My impression is that Mr. Mainwaring's mind is not quite right for the time being. Remember, I say for the time being. Typhoid is a very grave and terrible disease. Your husband suffered from an exceptionally serious attack. His apparently rapid recovery may have induced him to do more than he really had strength to undertake. If this were so, many strange symptoms might exhibit themselves. I can tell you more particulars with regard to the exact nature of his malady after I have seen him. The thing now is to try and find him. Before we begin our search, however, I should like to ask you a few questions of a practical nature. How old is your husband?"

"Nearly thirty-three."

"He took his degree at Cambridge, did he not?"

"Yes—just ten years ago. We talked much of it during the happy fortnight we spent there. We visited all his old haunts. He was a Trinity man, and loved his College with an enthusiasm I have seen in few. I never saw anyone happier than he was during the last fortnight. His spirits were gay. He seemed scarcely to know fatigue. He was always hunting up old friends."

"Were there many of the men of his time at Cambridge?"

"No—that was the sad thing. He has been unfortunate with regard to his friends. He made many, for he was popular and had a sympathetic manner which attracted people, but some had gone abroad and several had died. There was a Mr. Leigh in particular. He had been much attached to him in the old days. But he only heard of his death when we went to Cambridge, for he had completely lost sight of him for a long time. This news saddened him for a little."

"When did he hear of Leigh's death?"

"The day before yesterday. The Dean of his College told him. He was visibly affected for the time and talked of him to me all the evening. He told me several incidents with regard to a foreign tour they had taken together."

"Indeed! And he seemed depressed while he spoke?"

"Only just for a time."

"When did your husband and Mr. Leigh go abroad?"

Mrs. Mainwaring thought for a moment.

"It was just after Edward had taken his degree," she said. "He mentioned that fact also when he talked over matters the evening before last."

"From what part of England did Mr. Mainwaring and Mr. Leigh start on their foreign tour?"

"I think it must have been from Dover. Yes, I remember now; Edward said that Mr. Leigh arranged to meet him at Dover. He failed to keep his first appointment, and Edward had to remain at Dover waiting for him for twenty-four hours."

I thought over this piece of information for some time. The story was altogether puzzling; the queer thing about it being not so much the fact of Mainwaring's brain having gone wrong as the strange form his aberration seemed to have taken. It was too evidently the fact that he was either possessed by an active dislike to his wife, or had forgotten her existence. After some anxious thought I asked Mrs. Mainwaring one or two more questions.

"Did you notice anything peculiar in your husband the last evening and night you spent together?"

"Nothing whatever," she replied. "My dear husband was just his old self. His depression about Walter Leigh soon passed away, and he spoke cheerfully about his own prospects and said how exceptionally lucky he considered himself to be able to resume his professional work so soon after such a severe illness. The evening post, too, brought him a letter, which cheered him a good deal. It was from a solicitor in large practice, offering him the brief of a very important case which was to come on in the criminal courts. Edward was highly delighted at the thought of this work, which meant large fees, badly needed by us just at present. Early the next morning the post brought us the news about Nancy's illness. My husband wished to go with me to Croydon, but I dissuaded him. I did not consider him strong enough, notwithstanding his boasted return to health, for this fatigue. He saw me off at the station, however, and promised to meet me there the following morning, if the child were well enough for me to return."

"Were you surprised when you did not see him?"

"I was, for he is the sort of man who always keeps any engagement he makes."

"A few more questions, Mrs. Mainwaring; and first, how long have you been married?"

"Six years," she said, looking up with a faint blush on her white face, "and Nancy will be five in a week."

"You never happened to meet this Walter Leigh?"

"Never."

"Did your husband ever speak of him to you until two days ago?"

"It is strange, but he never did. He is, as a rule, a very busy man—much occupied with a growing practice."

"Did you happen to know any of his college friends?"

"No."

"You were not in any way connected with that part of his life?"

"No; we never met until at least three years after my husband left Cambridge."

"Thank you," I said. "I do not think I have anything further to ask you."

"But what do you mean to do?" she asked. "We can't sit here quietly and allow my unhappy husband to roam the country. He must be found, and at once. He—he may have..." Her lips trembled, she lowered her eyes.

"No," I said. "He has not committed suicide. Rest easy on that point. From what you tell me of your husband I feel inclined to think—of course, I may be wrong—but I feel strongly inclined to think that he is at Dover at the present moment."

"What can you possibly mean?"

"What I say. It is quite within the region of probability that he may be at Dover, waiting for his friend Walter Leigh to join him."

When I said this Mrs. Mainwaring looked at me as if she thought I, too, had taken leave of my senses. I took no notice of her expressive face.

"I am prepared to go with you to Dover," I said. "Shall we start at once?"

She looked dubious and terribly anxious. "It seems waste of time," she said, after a pause.

"I do not think so," I answered. "Your husband was in a weak state, notwithstanding his boasted strength. From what you tell me, he evidently exerted himself more than was wise while at Cambridge. By doing so, he strained a weakened frame. The brain forms the highest part of that frame, Mrs. Mainwaring, the highest and

also the most easily put out of order. Your husband exerted his body too much, and excited his brain by old memories and the regrets which must come to a man when he visits the scene of vanished friendships. You say that Mr. Mainwaring was visibly affected when he heard of his great friend's death?"

"He was, he was. He turned white when the Dean told him. The death was tragic, too. Walter Leigh was killed on an Alpine expedition. The marvellous thing was how the news never reached my husband before. This can only be accounted for by the fact that he spent the year of Mr. Leigh's death in America."

"All this confirms my theory," I continued, "that your husband's brain, long weakened by serious illness, suddenly gave way. Brain derangement, as we know, takes all kinds of unexpected forms. I believe that the form it has taken in Mainwaring's case is this. He has forgotten the recent years of his life and has gone back again to his old college days. His letter to the Don of Trinity College who has so long been dead confirms this theory. His strange conduct with regard to you, Mrs. Mainwaring, further strengthens it. I feel almost certain that I am right in these impressions. They are sufficiently strong to make me anxious to visit Dover immediately. Now, shall I go alone, or will you come with me?"

"Of course I'll come with you," she answered. She rose and began to draw on her gloves.

It was late June now, and the day had been a hot one. The twilight had faded into night when I assisted Mrs. Mainwaring into a hansom and directed the driver to take us to Victoria Station.

We caught our train by a minute or two, and in process of time found ourselves at Dover. During the journey Mrs. Mainwaring scarcely uttered a word. She had drawn her veil over her face and sat huddled up in a corner of the carriage, as if she were turned into stone. I saw that she was partly stunned by the shock, and I felt anxious about her, as well as her husband.

When we arrived at Dover, she drew up her veil and said, impulsively, "What do you mean to do?"

"Before I do anything I must ask you another question," I replied. "Have you any idea what your husband's habits were ten years ago? Was he extravagant or careful? For instance, on arriving at Dover, would he be likely to go to a good hotel?"

"He would go to the best," she answered. "He is not careful of money now, and I am sure he never could have been in the past."

"Then, if my surmise is correct," I said, "we are most likely to find him at the Lord Warden Hotel, which is, of course, the best in the town. Anyhow, it is worthwhile to go there first to make inquiries about him."

"Very well," she replied, in a submissive, hopeless kind of voice. She had yielded herself up to my directions, but up to the present moment I had failed to inspire her with any faith in the success of my mission. She was evidently oppressed with the fear that Mainwaring had committed suicide, and seemed to think my conjecture about him impossible.

As we were walking to the hotel, she said, suddenly, "If my husband is really out of his mind, we are ruined from a worldly point of view."

"I am sorry to hear that," I replied. "Have you no private means?"

"No," she answered. "My husband had his profession, and he was doing good work as a barrister. But there is no profession in the world which requires greater brain power than his. We have nothing to live on except what my husband earns."

"In case Mr. Mainwaring cannot earn money for a time, have you no relations who will help you?" I asked.

She shook her head. "We have no relations who will help us," she said. "It is true that my husband's father is still living—he is an old man, a clergyman. He has a small parish, and with difficulty makes both ends meet. It

would be impossible to expect assistance from him." She sighed heavily as she spoke. Then she continued, with a naiveté which touched me. "Even at this terrible moment I cannot help thinking of the children and of how they will suffer if our worst fears are fulfilled."

"Well," I said, in a cheerful tone, "we must hope for the best. The first thing is to find your husband. After that we must consider what is best to be done for him."

"Oh, can anything be done?" she asked, in a tone of supplication.

"We will see," I replied.

We arrived at the hotel and made inquiries. The name of Mainwaring was not in the visitors' book.

"That is nothing," I said, turning to Mrs. Mainwaring; "will you please describe your husband to the manager?" She did so, entering into a minute and faithful description.

"A tall gentleman, broadly made, with a slight stoop," repeated the manager after her. "He wears glasses, does he not, madam?"

"Sometimes, not always," she replied.

"Has he a pince-nez which he puts on whenever he wants to ask a question?" continued the manager.

Mrs. Mainwaring turned crimson. "Yes, yes," she exclaimed, "then he is here! Dr. Halifax, you are right."

The manager asked further questions. "A great many gentlemen wear glasses," he said. "I should like to be quite certain that madam's husband is really one of the visitors before I disturb any of them. The hour is late too, close on eleven o'clock, and a good many of the guests have gone to their rooms. About what age is the gentleman whom you want to find, madam?"

"He looks nearly forty," she replied at once, "although he is not in reality nearly so old. His hair is dark and slightly tinged with grey."

The manager called one of the waiters and spoke a few words to him. He then returned to us.

"I think," he said, "that there is a gentleman here who answers to madam's description, but I cannot find his name. Through an oversight it has not been entered in the visitors' book. The hotel is very full this evening. The gentleman who answers to your description," he continued, looking at Mrs. Mainwaring, "is occupying number 39. Do you think you would know him by his boots?"

"Certainly," she replied.

"Then they are probably at this moment outside his door. I will have them fetched, and you can look at them. Will you have the goodness to step inside the office, Mrs. Mainwaring, and you too, please, sir?"

I gave the manager my card, and told him that I was Mrs. Mainwaring's medical adviser. He motioned us to chairs, and in a short time a waiter appeared with a pair of boots on a tray.

"I have just taken these from outside the door of number 39," he said, holding them up for inspection.

A glance told me that they belonged to a large, but well-shaped foot. Mrs. Mainwaring rushed forward, gave utterance to a rejoicing cry, and picked them up. "These are undoubtedly Edward's boots," she exclaimed. "Yes, he is here. Thank the merciful God we have found him!"

"The gentleman has been in his room for some little time," exclaimed a waiter who had now come upon the scene. "Would madam like me to announce her arrival?"

"No," she said, turning very pale. "I will go to him without being announced. Will you come with me, Dr. Halifax?"

We went upstairs, and the chambermaid conducted us to the door of number 39. We knocked. The door was locked from within, but our summons was immediately answered by the approach of a manly step. The door was flung open and Mainwaring, with a Baedeker's guide in his hand, stood before us. Mrs. Mainwaring rushed to him and impulsively endeavoured to throw her arms round his neck. He started back in astonishment which was not feigned.

"May I ask?" he said, looking at me, his eyes darkening with anger, "to what I am indebted for this—this most extraordinary intrusion?"

"Don't you know me, Edward?" sobbed the poor girl. "I am your wife."

"You must be mad," he said. He looked at her with a blank stare of undisguised astonishment and even disgust. "I have not the pleasure of this lady's acquaintance," he said, addressing me in an icy tone.

"You don't know me?" she panted. "Oh, surely that must be impossible. I am your wife, Edward. Look at me again, and you will remember me. I am Nancy's mother—pretty Nancy, with her curling hair; you know how fond you are of Nancy. Don't you remember Nancy, and Bob, and baby? I am their mother. Dear, dear Edward, look at me again and you will know me. Look at me hard—I am your wife—your own most loving wife."

Notwithstanding her agitation, Mrs. Mainwaring had been quiet and self-restrained up to this moment. The intensity of her passion now seemed to transform her. She flung aside her travelling hat and jacket. She was desperate, and despair gave to her sudden beauty.

In all my experience of the sad things of life, I seldom saw more terrible pathos than that which now shone out of the eyes and trembled round the lips of this poor young woman. She was so absorbed in trying to get her husband to recognise her that she forgot my presence and that of the amazed chambermaid who, devoured with curiosity, lingered near.

"Edward," she said again, going up to her husband, "it is impossible that you can have forgotten me. I am your wife. I have been your wife for six years."

"Good Lord, madam!" he exclaimed, bursting into a terrible laugh. "If you were my wife six years ago, I must have married you when I was a boy. I had not left school six years ago. I am only twenty-three at the present moment. Do you mean to maintain that I married you when I was a lad of seventeen?"

"Edward, dear Edward, don't you know me?" she kept on pleading. Tears streamed down her cheeks. She dropped suddenly on her knees, and taking one of her husband's hands tried to raise it to her lips. Her manner, her words, her attitude, pathetic to us who stood by as witnesses, had a most irritating effect upon Mainwaring.

"Get up," he said. "This is all a plant. But however long you choose to carry this game on, you won't get anything out of me. I must ask you, madam, to leave my room immediately. I do not even know your name. I never saw you before. Will you, sir," he added, turning fiercely to me, "have the goodness to remove this lady immediately from my bedroom?"

Mrs. Mainwaring staggered to her feet. The cold sarcasm of the words of denial stung her to the quick. She approached the door, but before she could reach it she turned faint and would have fallen had I not caught her and placed her in a chair.

"This is all some diabolical scheme to ruin a respectable man," said Mainwaring. "Will you favour me with your name, sir?" he added, turning to me.

"Halifax," I answered. "I am a doctor. I attended you as a consulting physician in your late severe illness."

"Heavens, what next?" he exclaimed. "I never had a day of serious illness in my life."

"I think, Mrs. Mainwaring, we had better leave him for the present," I said. "I will speak to the manager"

Before I could add another word Mainwaring interrupted me hotly.

"Let it be clearly understood," he said, "that I forbid that woman to be called by my name. I will see this matter through myself. I have known of such things before. This is a scheme to ruin the character of an honourable man. But I shall take immediate care to nip it in the bud. Is that a chambermaid in the passage? Come here, please. Have the goodness to ask the manager to come to this room immediately. Do not go, madam, nor you either, sir, until I speak to the manager."

Mainwaring flung the Baedeker which he had been studying on a table. We heard some doors opened and some feet hurrying in our direction. Doubtless the chambermaid who had disappeared on Mainwaring's errand had already spread the news of our extraordinary story. When I heard people approaching I took the liberty to close the door of the room.

"What are you doing that for, sir?" exclaimed Mainwaring, whose face was now almost purple with excitement.

"Pray don't speak so loud," I replied, putting as much force and command into my voice as I possibly could. "I presume you do not wish the servants of the hotel to become acquainted with your private affairs."

He glanced at me savagely, but did not say anything further. A moment later the manager's knock was heard. I opened the door to him. He came in, looking anxious and disturbed, and asked why he had been sent for.

Mainwaring began to speak in an excited voice. "I have sent for you," he said, "to ask you to see that this man and woman leave the hotel immediately. They have forced their way into my room and have endeavoured to perpetrate a most disgraceful hoax upon me. This lady, whom I never saw before, has had the audacity to claim me as her husband. I wish you to understand clearly that both these people are impostors. They must leave this hotel immediately if you wish it to retain its character for respectability."

The manager looked puzzled, as well he might. Mainwaring, although he showed symptoms of strong excitement, must have appeared perfectly sane to an ordinary observer. Poor Mrs. Mainwaring, white and trembling, stood up and looked at me to defend her.

"This is a very extraordinary story," I said to the manager. "I will give you my version of it in another room."

"Come," I said, turning to Mrs. Mainwaring. She put her hand into mine and I led her into the passage. The instant we left the room Mainwaring shut and locked the door.

"That unfortunate gentleman is insane," I said to the manager of the hotel. "He must be watched, and on no account allowed to leave his bedroom without being followed."

"That is all very well, sir," replied the man, "but I must have very good evidence of the truth of your statements before I can allow any pressure to be put on the gentleman who occupies number 39. This is a very queer story, and Mr. Mainwaring showed no signs of insanity before you came. But, insane or not, it isn't to be supposed that he wouldn't know his own wife."

"Take us into a private room and let me explain matters to you," I said. The man did so.

"On your peril," I continued, "I must request you to set someone to watch that door. I am a medical man, and you cannot trifle with my requests with impunity. That gentleman is in a dangerous state, and he must be closely watched."

"Very well, sir," replied the manager, in a more civil tone, "I'll tell the night porter to keep an eye on the door."

He left us for a moment, but quickly returned. "Now, sir," he said. "I hope you'll have the goodness to explain matters a little, for, to say the least, it's a queer story."

"It is," I replied, "a very tragic one—the only explanation possible is that the unfortunate gentleman whom we have just left has become insane. I am a medical man. You can see my name in the *Medical Directory* if you look for it. I am well-known in the profession. The gentleman in number 39 has just recovered from a severe attack of typhoid fever. Until this morning he was apparently on the road to recovery. A fortnight ago he went with his wife to Cambridge to pay a short visit. They left their children at Croydon. Yesterday morning Mrs. Mainwaring heard of the illness of her eldest child and went to Croydon to see her, leaving her husband behind her at Cambridge. When she returned to Cambridge this morning he had vanished, leaving no trace behind him. We conjectured that he had come to Dover, and followed him here."

"I remember the gentleman now quite well," said the manager. "He came here quite early today and asked for a good bedroom, which he said he might want for a night or even two, as he was obliged to stay here until a friend joined him."

"Did he happen to tell you the name of the friend?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir, I remember the name quite well. Mr. Mainwaring said that Mr. Leigh might arrive at any moment, and that when he did he was to be shown immediately to his room."

When the manager mentioned Leigh's name Mrs. Mainwaring broke the silence which she had maintained until now. "Walter Leigh is dead," she exclaimed.

"Good Lord, dead!" cried the manager. "Was it sudden, madam? Does the—does Mr. Mainwaring know?"

"Walter Leigh is dead," she continued. "He has been dead for many years. But ten years ago my husband stayed at this hotel and waited for Walter Leigh to join him. He had to wait here for twenty-four hours. At the end of that time Mr. Leigh arrived, and they took the next boat to Calais."

"Have you the books of the hotel of ten years back?" I asked.

"Certainly, sir."

"Would you mind looking them up? It is important for all our sakes to substantiate the truth of this lady's words. Have you any idea, Mrs. Mainwaring, about what month your husband and Mr. Leigh went to the Continent?"

"Just after their degree examination," she replied. "They took their degrees together—that would be about this time of year."

"June, ten years back," commented the manager. He seemed much impressed now, and his manner showed me how greatly he was interested.

"I will go downstairs immediately and examine the books," he said. He returned in about ten minutes with a bewildered face.

"You are right, madam," he exclaimed; "but the good Lord only knows what it all means. I hunted up the visitors' book of ten years back, and there were the two names entered in the book as plain as you please: Edward Mainwaring, Walter Leigh. Mr. Leigh occupied number 25 and Mr. Mainwaring the room next to it, number 26. Now, what does all this mean?"

"That Mr. Mainwaring has forgotten ten years of his life," I answered, promptly. "He must be carefully watched during the night. Can you give Mrs. Mainwaring a bedroom? I shall also sleep at the hotel." The manager was now only too anxious to attend to our requirements. Mrs. Mainwaring was conducted to a room on the next floor and I occupied the bedroom next Mainwaring's, which happened to be empty.

Nothing occurred during the night, which was spent by me in anxious and wakeful conjecture.

At an early hour the next morning I joined Mrs. Mainwaring. One glance at her face showed me through what terrible suffering she had been passing. I told her without preamble what I considered the best and only thing to do.

"I have thought carefully over your husband's case," I said. "There is to my mind not the least doubt what has occurred. For some extraordinary reason Mr. Mainwaring has forgotten ten years of his life. His memory doubtless carries him accurately up to the date of his Cambridge degree. He remembers going to Dover, and is now under the impression that he is waiting for his friend, Mr. Leigh, to join him at this hotel. Whether he will ever recover the ten years which he has lost is impossible at the present moment to say. What I should advise now is this: Let someone whom Mr. Mainwaring knew intimately ten years ago come and see him, and tell him as simply and as forcibly as possible what has occurred. He may or may not believe this person's statement. I am inclined to hope, however, that he will bring his common-sense to bear on the matter and will not doubt what he is told; but of course I may be wrong. Anyhow, this, in my opinion, is the only thing to try. Has your husband any intimate friend whom he knew well ten years back?"

"There is his father," she replied at once.

"Good. He could not possibly see a person more likely to influence him. I think you said that his father was a clergyman—better and better—he is probably an excellent man, in whose word his son would place unbounded confidence. Does he live far away?"

"It so happens," she answered, a faint smile filling her eyes, "that my father-in-law's rectory is not far from here. His parish is close to Canterbury."

"Give me the address, and I will telegraph immediately," I said.

She supplied me with it, and I quickly prepared a telegram which was to bring the elder Mainwaring to his son's assistance. I was writing my telegram in the hall of the hotel when Mainwaring came downstairs. He looked full at his wife and me, but did not vouchsafe us the smallest sign of recognition. He entered the coffee-room, and I saw him sit down at a small table and order breakfast. I whispered to the wife to take no notice. The poor woman's eyes were full of tears and she was trembling excessively, but she had the courage to do what I told her.

She and I entered the coffee-room a few moments later. We had breakfast together. Mrs. Mainwaring sat with her back to her husband, but I faced him and watched him anxiously while I ate. He had called for a daily paper and began to read it. I watched his face and saw that the contents of the paper puzzled him a good deal. He passed his hand across his forehead, took off his pince-nez and rubbed it, finally flung the paper on the ground and strode out of the room.

At this moment a waiter brought me a telegram. I opened it. It was not in reply to the one I had sent to Mainwaring's father, but was from a patient in town. Its character was so urgent and unexpected that I was forced to attend to it at once. It was necessary for me to catch the next train to London. I told Mrs. Mainwaring what had occurred, expressed great regret at being forced to leave her under such trying circumstances, assured her that I did not anticipate any fresh development of Mainwaring's illness, begged of her to keep out of his way as much as possible, and to wait as patiently as she could for her father-in-law's arrival. I then gave some hasty directions to the manager of the hotel and left for London. I promised to return to Dover, if possible, that evening.

My patient in town, however, was far too ill to make it advisable for me to leave him. I could not go to Dover again that day. In the evening I received a telegram from Mrs. Mainwaring to say that her father-in-law had arrived, that her husband had received him with affection, but that otherwise his condition remained absolutely unaltered.

I wired back naming an early hour on the following day for my visit to Dover, and then tried to put these anxious circumstances out of my head.

I had just breakfasted on the following day and was preparing to start on my journey when my servant brought me a card. I look it up and read the name with amazement: Edward Mainwaring.

“Where is the gentleman?” I asked of the servant.

“I have shown him into the consulting-room, sir.”

“Did not you say that I was just going out?”

“Yes,” replied the man, “but he said he was sure when you saw his card that you would see him at once.”

“What aged person is he?” I asked.

“Middle-aged, I should say, sir. He is a tall gentleman, with a slight stoop. When he looked at me he put on his pince-nez.”

A startled exclamation passed my lips. What strange new development of Mainwaring’s disease had brought him to seek advice voluntarily from me? I rose at once and went to the consulting-room. My patient was standing by one of the windows, but when he heard my step he turned and walked towards me.

“I have come, Dr. Halifax,” he said, “to apologize for my rude behaviour towards you last night. Under the strange circumstances, I hope you will forgive me.”

“I forgive you a thousand times,” I replied in a hearty voice. “I cannot tell you with what inexpressible relief I see that you have already recovered your memory. Pray accept my warmest congratulations.”

“Congratulations!” repeated the poor fellow, with a grim smile, “for what? I have not recovered my memory. At the present moment I am an instance of the man who lives by faith.”

“What can you mean?” I said, much puzzled in my turn by his words.

“What I say,” he replied. “I live by faith. My father, whom I have always revered and loved as the best of men, has made a strange statement to me—his statement confirms the story you and—” here he hesitated slightly—“and the lady you brought with you the other evening told me. I believe my father—therefore I believe you. This is a very strong act of faith. Were I asked to describe what I alone know about myself, I should say that I am at the present moment twenty-three years of age, that I have just finished a successful academic career at Trinity College, Cambridge; I mean to become a barrister and am about to read for the law, but before entering on a somewhat severe course of study I propose to go abroad with my special friend, Walter Leigh. This is exactly how matters appear to me at the present moment.”

“With regard to my past, I can give you chapter and verse for almost every event which has occurred to me since I was a young child. My boyhood, my school days, in especial my recent life at Cambridge, are accurately remembered by me to the smallest detail. That, as far as I can tell, is my history. I am a young man with bright prospects just beginning life.”

“I am told, however, by one whose word I cannot doubt, that I have a further history of grave importance. I am married—I have a wife and three children. I have a house at Croydon, where I have lived for over six years. I am a common-law barrister and am rising in my profession. I have just recovered from a severe attack of typhoid fever, during which time you visited me twice in consultation with another doctor. My father tells me of all these things, and because he is my father I believe him; but, as a matter of fact, I remember nothing whatever of this important period of my existence. That poor girl whom I treated so harshly in your presence is in reality my wife. My father says so, and I believe his word, but I have not the most remote remembrance of ever seeing my wife before. When did I woo her? When did I marry her? What was her name before she took

mine? I remember nothing. All is an absolute and complete blank. In short, ten years, the most important ten years of a man's life, have been wiped out of mine. Am I insane?"

"Not in the ordinary sense," I replied; "but there is no doubt that something has gone wrong with a certain portion of your brain."

Mainwaring sank into a chair while I was speaking; now he sprang up and walked across the room.

"Merciful heavens!" he exclaimed, turning abruptly and facing me. "Then it is true. What reason is left to me almost reels before the astounding fact. It is absolutely true that my youth is over. As far as I am aware I never spent it. I never used it, but it is gone. I have a wife whom I do not love. I have children whom I care nothing whatever about. I have a profession about which I know nothing. I cannot give legal advice. I cannot accept briefs.

"My father tells me that I am a married man and a barrister. You tell me the same. I am bound to believe you both. I do believe you. All that you say is doubtless true. I am surely in the most horrible position that man ever found himself in. I am a husband, a father, a professional man. I do not remember my wife. I should not recognise my own children; and what is perhaps worst of all, from a practical point of view, I have completely lost all knowledge of my profession—I cannot therefore earn a single penny for the support of my family. I have come here today, Dr. Halifax, to ask you if anything can be done to give me back my ten years. Can you do anything for my relief? I am willing to undergo any risk. I am willing to submit to any suffering which can give me back the time that has slipped into oblivion."

"I must think carefully over your case," I said. "I need not say that it is of the deepest interest. I cannot tell you how glad I am that you have come to me as you have done. If you had chosen to doubt your father's word, it would have been absolutely impossible for me to have helped you. As it is..."

"I live by faith, as I said just now," repeated Mainwaring. "What is your thought with regard to my condition?"

"Your condition is strange indeed," I replied. "I cannot explain it better than by comparing the brain to the cylinder of a phonograph. The nerve cells, which can be counted by thousands of millions, represent the cylinder. When certain sensations are conveyed to these cells they are imprinted on them like the impressions made by the needle on the cylinder of the phonograph. Even years afterwards the same series of events or sounds are thus reproduced. You have lost your cylinder for ten years. What I have to do is to try by some means to give it back to you again. But before I say anything further, let me ask you a question or two. You say you feel like a young man of twenty-three about to enjoy a well-earned holiday. This is equivalent to announcing the fact that you feel in perfect health."

"I certainly feel perfectly well in body," replied Mainwaring. "My mind is naturally much disturbed and upset, but I have neither ache nor pain, except..." Here he paused.

"The word 'except' points to some slight discomfort, surely?" I replied, with eagerness. "Pray tell me exactly what you feel. Any clue, however slight, is most important."

"I have a certain numbness of my right fore-arm and hand, but this is really not worth mentioning. I am absolutely strong and well. I feel twenty-three." He sighed heavily as he spoke, and sinking into a chair, looked fixedly at me. "What do you consider the cause of my extraordinary condition?" he asked, abruptly.

"The cause," I replied, "is either the plugging of an artery or the rupture of a small vessel in your brain. Thanks to the valuable researches of eminent men who have made the localization of cerebral functions the work of their lives, I am able to tell pretty readily in what portion of your brain the mischief lies."

"How?" asked Mainwaring, starting forward in his chair and gazing at me with eyes of devouring interest.

"You yourself have given me the clue," I answered, with a smile. "You tell me you have a distinct feeling of numbness in your right fore-arm and hand. We know that some of the highest cerebral centres are closely connected with the centres of the nerves of that limb. I can picture to myself—though, of course, I may be wrong—the exact spot where this lesion has taken place. It is certainly most important that something definite should be done to restore your memory and all it entails."

"Then you will do that something?" exclaimed Mainwaring. "You cannot hesitate. You will not lose a moment in giving me the relief which I earnestly crave for."

"I should like to consult Dr. Oliphant, the great brain specialist," I replied.

Mainwaring sprang again to his feet. "No," he said, "that I cannot permit. He may say nothing can be done, and then you may have scruples with regard to the right of exposing my life to a certain risk. I will permit no consultation. If you know what is the matter with me, you can give me relief without seeking for further assistance. Do you think I value life under existing circumstances? Not that!" He flipped some imaginary substance away from him as he spoke with his finger and thumb. "I put myself absolutely into your hands, Dr. Halifax," he said, making an effort to restrain himself. "You say that an artery is plugged in my brain, or that there is the rupture of a small blood-vessel. You can surely do something to remove the obstruction?"

"Yes," I said, "I can perform a certain operation, which I will shortly explain to you. I know you are a brave man; I do not, therefore, hesitate to tell you that the operation is of a very serious nature, also that there is a possibility of my being wrong with regard to the localization of the injury."

"There is also a possibility of your being right," retorted Mainwaring. "I will accept the risk. I wish the operation to be performed."

"I should certainly like to consult Dr. Oliphant," I repeated.

"You cannot do so against my express wish. I insist on the operation being performed, even at the risk of life—can I say more?"

"You certainly cannot," I answered. I looked fixedly at him. He was a fine fellow. Intelligence, resolve, endurance, were manifest in his expressive eyes and strong, masculine features.

"I am inclined to believe that I shall be successful," I said, rising and speaking with enthusiasm. "I will agree to do what you wish, and we will leave the results in the Highest Hands. The operation is doubtless a very grave one, but you are a man temperate in all things. You have also abundantly proved that you have a good constitution. With extreme care your life may not be even endangered. In that case you will be, at the worst, only as you are now. At the best you will be yourself once again. If what I think is the case, I can, by the operation which I propose, remove the obstruction which now cuts off from a portion of your brain the necessary life blood which alone can assure its working. In short, I can restore your brain to its normal state. I propose to open the cranial cavity at the exact spot where I think the mischief is."

"Good," replied Mainwaring; "I leave myself in your hands. How soon can you put me right?"

"I must see your wife and your father."

"Will you return with me now to Dover?"

"No," I answered. "You are so far yourself that you do not need me to accompany you. Take the next train to Dover. Tell your father and wife what you have resolved to do. I will take lodgings for you in a quiet street near this, and will perform the operation tomorrow."

A moment or two later Mainwaring left me. The die was practically now cast. I was going to experiment, and in a daring manner. It was possible that the result might lead to fatal consequences. I knew this possibility; nevertheless, I scarcely feared that it would arise. I had explained everything clearly to Mainwaring—he was

willing to accept the risk. If his wife and father were also willing, I would perform the operation on the following day.

That afternoon I took comfortable rooms for my patient in a street adjoining that in which I lived. I also engaged an excellent surgical nurse, in whom I could place perfect confidence. There was then nothing more to do except to await the arrival of the Mainwarings.

Mrs. Mainwaring and her father-in-law arrived at the rooms which I had taken for them late that evening. They sent me a message at once to say they would be glad to see me, and I hurried to pay them a visit.

Mrs. Mainwaring looked pale—her face was haggard—her eyes disturbed and restless. She came impulsively to meet me, and clasped one of my hands in both of hers.

“Edward has told me what you propose to do,” she exclaimed, “and I am willing—I am abundantly willing that he should run this great risk.”

Her words almost surprised me. I looked from her to her father-in-law, who now held out his hand.

“I have often heard of you, Dr. Halifax,” he said, with a courteous, old-fashioned gesture. “I think you know some special friends of mine. I may say that I place absolute confidence in your skill, and am willing to put my son’s life in your hands.”

I looked attentively from one face to the other. “I am glad you both give your consent,” I replied. “I should not perform the operation, which I trust will relieve Mr. Mainwaring, without your mutual sanction. I must tell you plainly, however, that although I am willing to do it, it is accompanied by grave risk, and I do not believe another doctor in London would attempt it.”

“You mean that Edward may die?” said the wife in a low voice.

I looked her full in the eyes. “There is a possibility,” I said.

“But I do not think he will,” she said, a wonderful light leaping into her face. “I am a woman—a woman does not always reason, but she strongly believes in instincts—my instinct tells me that you will save my husband, and in short give him back to me as he was before. At the worst, even at the worst...” here she turned ghastly pale, “he would know me in another world. I could endure to be parted with him on those conditions. I cannot—I cannot endure the present state of things.”

Her composure suddenly gave way, she sobbed aloud.

“There is nothing more to be said,” I remarked, after a brief pause. “I have all your consents, and have made full arrangements to perform the operation tomorrow morning. A clever surgeon, whom I know well, will assist me, and an excellent trained nurse will arrive at an early hour to get the patient ready for our visit. By the way, where is your husband, Mrs. Mainwaring?”

She had dried her eyes by this time. “He is in the house,” she said, “but he does not wish to see you again until the moment when you can give him relief.”

I said a few more words, and soon afterwards took my leave.

Early the next morning, accompanied by a surgeon and an anesthetist on whose assistance I could depend, I arrived at Queen Anne’s Street. We were shown at once to the room where my patient waited for me. He was sitting in a chair near the window. The nurse was standing in the background, having made all necessary preparations.

“Here you are,” he said, rising and greeting me with a cheerful smile, “and here am I, and there is a Providence over us. Now, the sooner you put things right the better.”

His courage delighted me. I was also much relieved to find that neither his wife nor father was present.

"With the help of God, I believe I shall put you right," I said, in a tone of assurance which I absolutely felt.

An hour and a half later I went into the sitting-room, where Mainwaring's father and wife were anxiously waiting for my verdict.

"The operation is well over," I exclaimed, "and my patient is at present sound asleep. When he awakens the moment will have arrived when we must prove whether I have done anything for him or not. Will you have the courage to come into the room with me, Mrs. Mainwaring? I should like him to see you when he opens his eyes. If he recognises you, I shall know that I have been successful."

To my surprise she shrank back. "No," she said, "the ordeal is too terrible. Failure means too much agony. I cannot endure it; I am not strong enough."

"Then what is to be done?" I asked.

"In any case, Mainwaring will know his father. His knowledge of you is the test which I require to tell me whether I have succeeded or failed."

She smiled faintly and left the room. In a moment she returned, holding by the hand a beautiful little girl of five years of age. She had a wealth of red-gold hair falling almost to her waist; her large eyes were like sapphires.

"This is Nancy," said the mother, "her father's pet and idol. I sent for her this morning. When my husband awakens, take her into the room—she is not shy. If her father recognises her, all is well."

"Very well," I replied.

All that day I watched by Mainwaring; in the evening I came for Nancy. "Come," I said. The child looked at me with her grave eyes—she was perfectly calm and self-possessed. I lifted her in my arms and left the room with her. I entered the bedroom where my patient lay. The child's arms encircled my neck. My heart was beating quickly, anxiously. Little Nancy looked at me in surprise.

"Is father ill?" she asked.

Mainwaring's eyes were open. I put the child on the floor.

"Go and speak to him," I said.

She ran up to the bed. "Are you ill, dad?" she repeated, in a clear, high voice.

"Halloa, Nan!" he said, smiling at her.

He stretched out one of his hands. The child caught it and covered it with kisses.

"Send your mother to me, my sweet Nan," he said, after a pause.

Then I knew that Mainwaring had got back his ten years.

L.T. Meade and Clifford Halifax, "Ten Years' Oblivion," *The Strand Magazine* 7 (February 1894):159–174.